

Keeping Parent and Student Voices at the Forefront of Reform



Annenberg
Institute for
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA ORGANIZING PROJECT | YOUTH UNITED FOR CHANGE



ORGANIZED
COMMUNITIES,
STRONGER SCHOOLS

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EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA ORGANIZING PROJECT/YOUTH UNITED FOR CHANGE



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KEEPING PARENT AND STUDENT VOICES AT THE FOREFRONT OF REFORM



Overview: Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project and Youth United for Change

Whether it's issues in schools or housing or anything else, there's what the very well-intentioned, capable, and in some cases extraordinary policy and program folks do in government. But you also have to hear how it's really playing and working at the grassroots, whether it's the classroom, the street corner, whatever. So I think that [groups like EPOP and YUC] help shape the discussion, add insights that people in government or in businesses or anywhere else can't have, don't have. That back and forth is really critical.

— Debra Kahn, former Philadelphia secretary of education

Challenges and change are the constants defining the Philadelphia public schools system. Successive waves of districtwide reform, takeover, privatization efforts, and ongoing reorganization strained an already thin civic and educational infrastructure. In this context, two community organizations, Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project (EPOP) and Youth United for Change (YUC), emerged as key voices in the struggle to ensure that low-income neighborhoods would benefit from reform. Their organizing efforts included intensive leadership development with high school students and public school parents, building relationships with education leaders and public officials, conducting research on school reform strategies, and maintaining a long-term commitment to improved educational outcomes in the midst of major systemic upheaval.

EPOP's and YUC's education campaigns succeeded in keeping the voices of parents and students at the forefront of reform. School campaigns pushed district officials to respond to concrete and immediate needs: old facilities, violence in and surrounding schools, outdated and insufficient library materials. Both organizations also pushed for districtwide reform. In collaboration with Research for Democracy, EPOP published a research report that brought visibility to parents' and teachers' concerns about transparency in the wake of the state takeover of the

district. The report provided district leaders with concrete strategies for communicating more effectively with parents. Likewise, YUC's extensive research on small schools and ongoing surveys of high school students positioned the group to influence the district's high school reform strategy, ensuring that reforms reflected both students' interests and best practices for effective small schools.

In this study, we documented EPOP's and YUC's education organizing across the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Drawing on interviews, field observations, archival documents, and administrative data, we describe the impact of the two organizations' work to influence district policy, increase school capacity, and improve student outcomes. This research study found that organizing contributed to increased educational opportunities in several important ways.

More equity

- ◆ Data showed that EPOP's and YUC's organizing influenced district priorities and resource allocations, particularly in parent involvement, small high school reform, standardized testing, school discipline, and distribution of federal Title I funds.
- ◆ The organizations secured funding for vital classroom resources, such as computers and books; new reading, math, nutrition, college-counseling, and after-school programs; and a wide range of school facilities improvements.

Greater parent engagement, student engagement, and school accountability to the community

- ◆ District leaders reported that EPOP's advocacy pushed the district to create school-based parent support rooms and help desks, provide information to parents, and implement a new system to facilitate ongoing teacher–parent communication.
- ◆ YUC's work to maintain a consistent presence in district-level arenas by speaking at district meetings and in private sessions with regional and district officials created constructive opportunities for district leaders to interact with students from low-performing high schools.
- ◆ In both instances, genuine engagement of parents and students added to the organizations' perceived legitimacy by school and system officials.

Greater educational opportunity

- ◆ The district's embrace of YUC's plan to replace a large, failing high school with four new schools of 400 to 500 students was a major achievement amid budget cuts and a district policy of creating larger schools of 800 to 1,000 students.
- ◆ New small schools on the Kensington High School campus, where YUC concentrated its small-school efforts, showed higher rates of student attendance, decreased dropout rates, and increased numbers of students who identify as college bound than in the large high school that the small schools replaced.

EPOP's and YUC's evolving school reform analysis, strategies, and tactics trace an arc from school-level organizing to a district-level strategy and ultimately to a combination of both, as the two groups grappled with how to catalyze and sustain reform. The result is an ongoing process in which young people and parents are deeply engaged in the struggle to improve the quality of public education in Philadelphia.

Organized Communities, Stronger Schools: An Introduction to the Case Study Series

Because good intentions are not enough, when not fortified with political will and political power.

— U.S. President Barack Obama

The opening quote, a reflection from Barack Obama on the lessons he learned during his post-college stint as a community organizer, cuts to the core of why organizing matters. Even the most well-intentioned of policies (and politicians) are often insufficient to bring about desired outcomes. Political will and political power are necessary forces to carry those good intentions forward and to hold political actors accountable when those intentions go unrealized.

In low-income neighborhoods like the ones on the South Side of Chicago where Obama organized, political power is not attained through wealth or status. Rather, power comes from numbers – from bringing together ordinary people to identify critical community concerns and to act collectively and strategically for improvements to their communities, neighborhoods, and schools.

This research follows the organizing efforts undertaken by residents of low- to moderate-income communities throughout the country, specifically in the arena of public school reform. In addition to documenting their campaigns, we aim to get underneath the organizing process to assess the tangible impacts of organizing on students and their schools. In other words, does the political will generated by organizing – in the arena of education reform – ultimately enhance the capacity of schools to improve student learning?

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL REFORM

Neither community organizing nor public education activism is new in the United States. But increasingly in the last fifteen years, community organizations have used organizing as a focused and deliberate strategy for school improvement, particularly within low- and moderate-income communities.

Instead of relying on more traditional forms of parent and community involvement (getting involved in school activities or serving on district-sponsored committees, for instance), organizing groups mobilize parents, youth, and community members for local school improvement and districtwide reform, often applying pressure from the outside to generate the political will necessary to adopt and implement reforms. In the process, these organizing efforts aim to equalize power dynamics between school and district administrators and low-income parents and

Community Organizing for School Reform . . .

- Brings together public school parents, youth and community residents, and/or institutions to engage in collective dialogue and action for change
- Builds grassroots leadership by training parents and youth in the skills of organizing and civic engagement
- Builds political power by mobilizing large numbers of people around a unified vision and purpose
- Focuses on demands for accountability, equity, and quality for all students, rather than on gains for individual students
- Aims to disrupt long-standing power relationships that produce failing schools in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and communities of color
- Uses the tactics of direct action and mobilization to put pressure on decision-makers when necessary

community members, who may otherwise feel marginalized or powerless to challenge educational inequities.

Nationally, it is estimated that more than 200 community groups are engaged in organizing for better schooling (Mediratta & Fruchter 2001; Gold, Simon & Brown 2002). These organizing groups have responded to a variety of parental and youth concerns, including unsafe environmental and facilities conditions, overcrowded schools, dangerous school crossings, inadequate school funding, unresponsive administrators, and inexperienced teachers.

Many researchers have noted the failure of traditional approaches to education reform to bring about deep and lasting school improvement. Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton, for example, attribute the “sorry and familiar story of school reform gone awry” to educators’ singular focus on changing the internal “technical aspects” of schooling, without adequately attending to the political, social, and cultural dimensions of schooling. Oakes and Lipton argue,

The logic and strategies employed in social and political movements – in contrast to those found in organizational change models – are more likely to expose, challenge, and if successful, disrupt the prevailing norms and politics of schooling inequality. . . . Without attention to these dynamics, such reforms are abandoned entirely or implemented in ways that actually replicate (perhaps in a different guise) the stratified status quo. (Oakes & Lipton 2002, p. 383)

Oakes and Lipton’s analysis reflects an increased interest from both practitioners and researchers in understanding the potential role of community organizing in contributing to sustainable improvements in education.

ABOUT THE STUDY

To date, research on community organizing for school reform has been mostly qualitative and includes numerous reports (Gold, Simon & Brown 2002; HoSang 2005; Zachary & olatoye 2001), as well as excellent and detailed book-length analyses of organizing efforts (Oakes, Rogers & Lipton 2006; Warren 2001; Shirley 1997). But comparatively few research studies examine the effect of these groups’ work on local schools and communities. How have organizing efforts influenced district policies and practices? In what ways does the culture of schools change because of involvement in organizing? And most important, are educational outcomes better for students when organizing is in the picture? This study, initiated in 2002 with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, sought to address these critical questions.

The six-year, mixed-methods study – the first of its kind – followed the school reform campaigns of seven organizing groups nationally.¹ The study examined the impact of organizing on the leadership development of those involved and also assessed the impact of organizing on three critical indicators of education reform: district-level policy, school-level capacity, and student outcomes.

Organized Communities, Stronger Schools, the report of preliminary findings released in March 2008, measured and linked the impacts of community organizing to specific performance indicators (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister 2008). We found that sophisticated organizing at the grassroots level can indeed make major contributions to improving student achievement. Across multiple data sources, we observed strong and consistent evidence that effective community organizing:

- ◆ stimulates important changes in educational policy, practices, and resource distribution at the system level;
- ◆ strengthens school–community relationships, parent involvement and engagement, and trust in schools; and
- ◆ contributes to higher student educational outcomes, including higher attendance, test score performance, high school completion, and college-going aspirations.

¹ An eighth group, Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope, was involved at the onset of the study. Because they did not participate in the study across the whole six years, we have not produced a case study of their organization.

² The work described in this study was carried out by Chicago ACORN until January 2008, when the director, staff, and board left ACORN to start a new group called Action Now, which is continuing the education and other organizing campaigns initiated while they were affiliated with ACORN.

THE CASE STUDY SERIES

Following up on *Organized Communities, Stronger Schools*, we offer a case study series that presents an in-depth look at each of the organizing groups in our study. The study sites are:

- ◆ Austin Interfaith (Austin, Texas), affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)
- ◆ Chicago ACORN (Chicago, Illinois), affiliated with the national network Association of Communities Organized for Reform Now²
- ◆ Community Coalition and its youth organizing arm, South Central Youth Empowered thru Action (Los Angeles, California)
- ◆ Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project and its youth organizing affiliate, Youth United for Change (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); EPOP was affiliated with the PICO (People Improving Communities through Organizing) national network until 2009
- ◆ Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition and its youth organizing arm, Sistas and Brothas United (Bronx, New York)
- ◆ Oakland Community Organizations (Oakland, California), affiliated with PICO
- ◆ People Acting for Community Together (Miami, Florida), affiliated with the Direct Action and Research Training (DART) Center

Each case study traces the group's education organizing campaigns and considers the impact of this work on promoting resource equity and district accountability for improved educational outcomes. In three

districts – Austin, Miami, and Oakland – where the education reform strategy was in place at least five years, we also examine trends in school capacity and student educational outcomes. Though educators predicted gains in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia resulting from the organizing conducted by groups in our study, the reforms are either too new and/or do not integrate enough intensive school-based organizing for us to assess their school capacity and student outcome impacts through administrative or survey data. In these cases, we focus on documenting the group's organizing efforts and examining preliminary indicators of impact.

The case studies in this series will be made available for download, as they are published, at <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/Mott.php>.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our analysis of impacts both across sites and within sites is guided by a conceptual framework – or logic model – for how organizing leads to change in schools. The framework, presented in the 2004 publication *Constituents of Change* (see Mediratta 2004; Figure 1), provides a guiding theory of change for how community organizing stimulates improvements in both community capacity and district and school

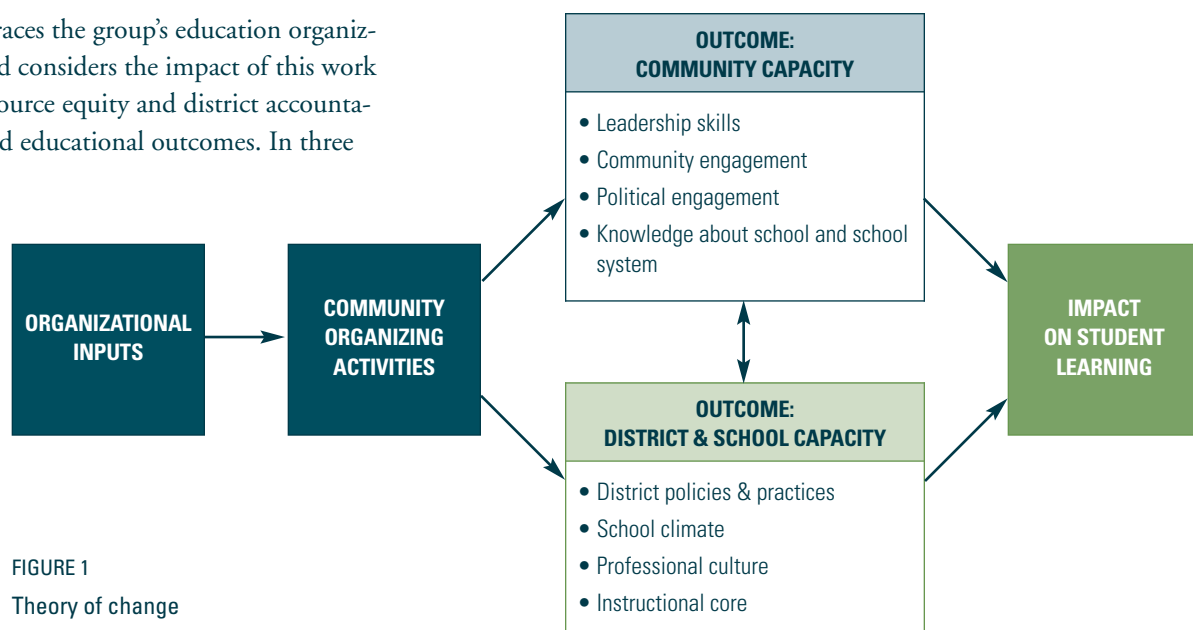


FIGURE 1
Theory of change

capacity. In the current series of case studies, we focus on how organizing influences district and school capacity and student learning.

We ground our assessment of district and school capacity outcomes in the existing educational change literature. We draw primarily from the seminal research on essential supports conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which outlines five broad dimensions of school capacity (leadership, parent–community ties, professional capacity, student-centered learning climate, ambitious instruction) that are associated with better student outcomes (Sebring et al. 2006). We also pull from Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider’s work on trust in schools (2002), Richard Elmore’s writings on teaching practice (1996; 2002; 2004), the National

Center for Education Statistics’ articulation of school quality indicators (Mayer et al. 2000), and research on indicators of education organizing conducted by Eva Gold and Elaine Simon at Research for Action and Chris Brown at the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform (2002).

Based on the above conceptual framework, we would expect improvements on intermediate indicators of district and school capacity to produce a higher-quality learning experience. In turn, we would expect this stronger learning environment to result in improved student outcomes. Though changes in school and district capacity are important outcomes in their own right, they take on added significance because of their links to student achievement. Critical dimensions of district and school capacity are outlined in Figure 2.

DATA SOURCES

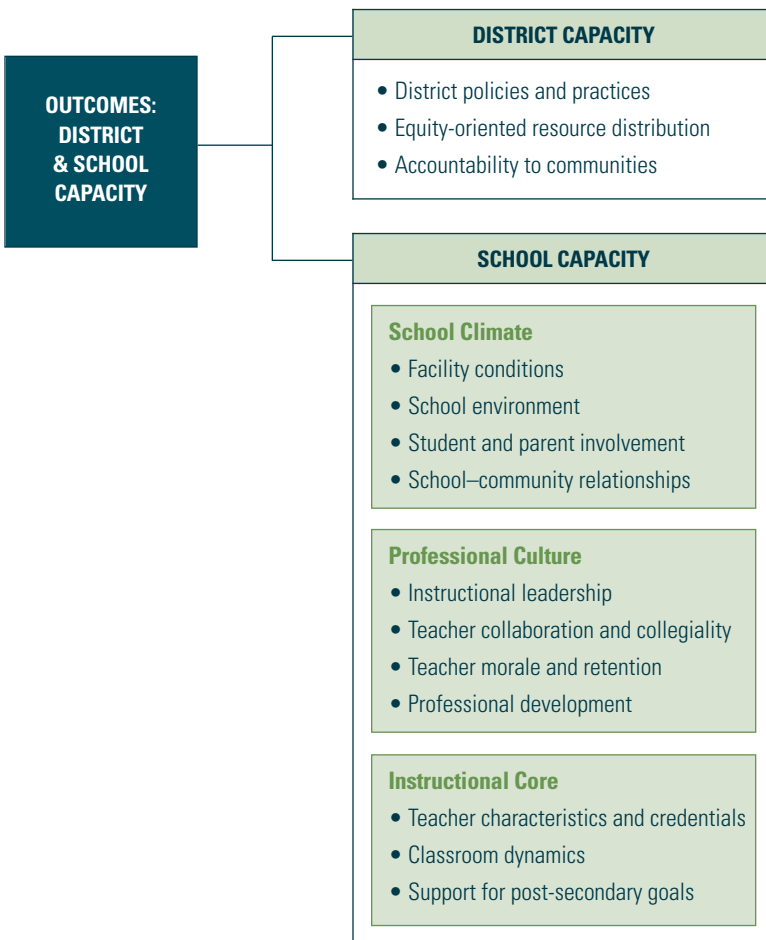
Our study uses a rigorous mixed-methods design to understand the impacts of organizing on district and school capacity and student outcomes. We collected 321 stakeholder interviews; 75 observations of organizing strategy sessions, campaign activities, and actions; 509 teacher surveys; and school demographic and outcome data for each of the seven school districts.

We used interviews and observational data with community organizers and adult and youth members to clarify the theories of action and resultant educational change strategies guiding organizing groups’ work, and to assess members’ knowledge about education policy and their sense of efficacy in generating change within their schools and communities. Publicly available school-level administrative data, interviews with district and school leaders, and teacher surveys were used to analyze district-, school-, and student-level outcomes. Impacts of community organizing were thus assessed in three ways:

- ◆ **District and school leaders’ attributions.** We examined district and school leaders’ perceptions of the impact of organizing groups on district and

FIGURE 2

Dimensions of district and school capacity that lead to improved student outcomes



school decision making, capacities, and relationships with parent, youth, and community constituencies.

- ◆ **Teachers' attributions.** We assessed teachers' perceptions of a variety of school context indicators, and whether they believed that changes in school climate, professional culture, and instructional indicators had been influenced by the groups' actions.
- ◆ **Student outcomes.** We reviewed administrative data on student attendance, standardized test performance, graduation and dropout rates, and college aspirations in the schools targeted by groups in our study.

We also analyzed our data to understand how groups achieve their impact – that is, we identified the critical organizing processes and strategic choices that enabled organizing groups to effectively challenge the status quo and help improve schooling conditions and educational outcomes in their communities.

A detailed description of the data sources and methods of collection can be found in Appendix A.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Community organizing for school reform does not occur in isolation from the messy realities of communities, politics, and schools. Linking organizing strategies to change – either in the community at large or in complex institutions such as schools – poses critical challenges for research. Given the intricacies of schools, communities, and the dynamic contexts in which they are situated, it is neither feasible nor desirable to create an experimental research design from which causal inferences might be drawn between the activities of organizing groups and the schooling outcomes they hope to stimulate.

For example, because organizing groups make decisions based on the priorities of community members and the urgency of problems in their local schools, random assignment of schools as “treatment” and “non-treatment” is not a reasonable or appropriate strategy. Even if such a design were possible, it would be difficult to pinpoint organizing as the “cause” of

these changes, given the high turnover among superintendents, principals, teachers, and students that characterizes large urban districts, the presence of other reforms at the school, as well as the ebbs and flows of organizing itself that occur over time (Connell, Kubisch, Schorr & Weiss 1995; Berliner 2002).

To assess the schooling impacts of organizing groups, then, we employed a complex, mixed-methods design that assumes that community change efforts are multi-dimensional interventions that are evolving in response to constant changes in context. By using multiple data sources and carefully examining points of convergence and divergence within the data, we can contextualize and explain conclusions the data suggest about impact. Our ability to draw inferences in support of our research hypotheses is based on the consistency of evidence across these multiple data sources and forms of analysis.

In carrying out this research, we engaged in a collaborative research process with our sites, sharing preliminary findings at each stage of our analysis, so that their intimate knowledge of the school, district, and community contexts informed our interpretation and understanding of the data.

Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project and Youth United for Change

Belinda Amaro didn't know where she wanted to go. She just knew she couldn't live in West Kensington anymore. The 11-year-old made that decision when her mother rushed home in tears after drug dealers threatened to torch their two-story row house.

That was last summer.

This summer, Belinda is a different child because her neighborhood is a different neighborhood. Gone is the drug house that loomed over the Isaac A. Sheppard Elementary School yard. The streets hold more cops and crossing guards, fewer street-corner drug dealers. More counselors are available to ease trauma. Rainwater no longer leaks into the classrooms. The last few months, Belinda has watched her mother, Angelina Rivera, and other school parents score against drugs, violence, and blight.

And that changed Belinda's view of her world.

"I decided this year I didn't want to move," Belinda said, sitting in her living room. "I feel a lot safer the last few months. Now sometimes we can go out and play. Last year, we just went to school and back home."

The changes didn't happen overnight, and obstacles and setbacks could have easily choked neighborhood leaders. Even after numerous successes, Rivera and her neighbors readily admit they didn't create a utopia.

But today they force response from city officials. They are no longer ignored. They are respected.

— *Barbara Laker*, Philadelphia Daily News, July 14, 1995

In the early 1990s, Philadelphia was one of the nation's poorest urban centers. The city faced massive middle-class flight, and entrenched racial segregation produced neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty dotted with shuttered factories, vacant houses, and abandoned cars. In 1991, the city government had to borrow \$150 million from its pension fund just to stay solvent (de Courcy Hinds 1991).

In this context of a struggling city, Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project (EPOP) and its youth affiliate, Youth United for Change (YUC), began organizing in Philadelphia schools.

ABOUT PHILADELPHIA

The second half of the twentieth century was not kind to Philadelphia. Between 1950 and 1990, the city lost 80 percent of its manufacturing jobs and a third of its population. While Mayor Ed Rendell, elected in 1992, managed to improve the fiscal situation and attract jobs during the mid-1990s, the city faced substantial obstacles to stability. Philadelphia ranked among the lowest of the nation's large cities on employment and college-going rates. A report commissioned by the Pew Charitable Trusts in 1999 characterized Philadelphia's civic leadership as "weak, inadequate, and disengaged." One civic leader, anonymously quoted in the report, described the city as one that "settles for being just okay" (Christman & Rhodes 2002).

The city's straits were reflected in its public schools. Less than a tenth of its elementary and middle schools met national reading norms, half its students failed the annual reading test, and a quarter of first-graders were retained each year. In 1993, the Pennsylvania legislature froze the state's school-funding formula, even though the state ranked near the bottom in state funding for schools.

This freeze meant that cities could no longer petition for additional money to meet the challenges of enrollment increases or high-needs populations. The proportion of students on welfare in Philadelphia was approaching 50 percent, enrollment was growing, and the city had large shares of English language learners and students with disabilities. The city's weak tax base made it impractical to replace state funds with local levies, as other towns and cities did (Christman & Rhodes 2002).

In 1994, business and civic leaders recruited David Hornbeck, a former civil rights leader regarded as a visionary and dynamic reformer, to the superintendency. Hornbeck quickly announced a bold, system-wide reform effort called Children Achieving that would decentralize decision making, raise standards and accountability, and mobilize citizens and leaders to demand adequate funding from the state.

The initiative was well received locally and nationally and won the district a \$50 million challenge grant from the Annenberg Foundation. But inadequate school funding, low student achievement, and low civic capacity for change were ongoing challenges. Many observers saw the sheer size and ambition of Hornbeck's reforms – and the many directions in which school-system leaders were pulled as a result – as undermining the effectiveness and sustainability of the effort (Corcoran & Christman 2002).

In 1997 and 1998 the district, joined by community and civic leaders, filed several lawsuits alleging that the state failed to fund an adequate education. Despite the prospect of huge shortfalls, Hornbeck and the school board refused to make cuts to the district budget. Instead, district leaders insisted that it was the state's responsibility to pay for underfunded programs. Governor Tom Ridge and the legislature responded by passing legislation to allow the state to take control of districts with financial shortfalls and low performance.

Mayor John Street, elected in 1999, managed to avert a state takeover of the Philadelphia public schools for one year by arranging a financial settlement with the state. Superintendent Hornbeck resigned in protest over the budget cuts that Street implemented to reach the settlement.

In 2001, as the Philadelphia public schools faced a budget deficit of \$216 million, the state initiated takeover proceedings. Governor Ridge, a supporter of school vouchers and privatization, hired for-profit Edison Schools to study the district and design a blueprint for the takeover. To many observers, Edison's involvement opened the possibility that Edison would assume control of the schools and key district management functions.

EPOP'S AND YUC'S EDUCATION ORGANIZING

During Hornbeck's tenure, neighborhood organizing had expanded throughout the city, supported in part by a substantial grant from the Annenberg Foundation. Much of this organizing involved school campaigns, with some mobilization on budget issues.

The threat of privatization catalyzed citywide activism. This broad public outcry, led by youth and community organizing groups including EPOP and YUC, gave Mayor Street leverage to negotiate a "friendly" takeover. Governor Ridge left the state to become Secretary of Homeland Security, and Lieutenant Governor Mark Schweiker took over the negotiations. The state provided an additional \$75 million to the district, established a five-person School Reform Commission (SRC) to which Schweiker appointed three members and Street the remaining two, and announced plans to hand control of as many as forty-five schools to Edison.

In 2002, in response to continued organizing against the proposed privatization, the SRC introduced a bidding process for nonprofit and for-profit managers. In the end, management of forty-six schools was awarded to six private and public managers, including Edison and several local universities. The SRC hired Paul Vallas, former CEO of Chicago Public Schools, to lead the district.

Vallas dismissed talk of a role for private managers in administering the district. Instead, he embarked on a program of standardizing and strengthening reading and math instruction and renovating and building new school facilities; he introduced summer school and after-school programs for struggling students and a zero-tolerance discipline policy. Vallas also expanded high school choice by opening magnet schools and breaking apart large, failing high schools.

The turbulence in Philadelphia public schools, coupled with the absence of a strong civic infrastructure, created difficult terrain for organizing. The pace and scale of reform under Hornbeck, the persistent battles over school funding, and the disruptive effects of a state takeover shifted education officials' attention away from the needs of individual neighborhoods and schools. Many education activists observed that the district's efforts to attract and retain middle- and upper-income families led, unfairly, to a prioritization of resources for gentrifying Center City neighborhoods to the detriment of poorer outlying neighborhoods. Despite these challenges, EPOP and YUC affirmed the rights of parents and young people to be involved in shaping educational decisions and to demand equitable treatment of their schools.

In this research study, we document EPOP's and YUC's education organizing across the mid-1990s and early 2000s and describe the impact of the two organizations' efforts to influence district policy, increase school capacity, and improve student outcomes. We begin by describing the groups' histories and approaches to education organizing and document their major campaigns. We then examine the impacts of these campaigns on schools and district priorities and discuss the implications of this impact for improved student learning.

Though YUC was an affiliate of EPOP and the two groups collaborated on a number of citywide education reform campaigns, EPOP's focus was mainly on elementary schools, while YUC organized in high schools. Thus, we describe each group's work and examine its impacts separately.

Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project

Founded in 1993, the Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project is a faith-based community organization comprising twenty-five member congregations, schools, parent associations, and other neighborhood institutions. EPOP arose to address abandonment and neglect in east Philadelphia neighborhoods following a long period of economic decline. EPOP has led successful campaigns for affordable housing, renovation of vacant buildings, improved access to healthcare, reduction of violence, and improved public safety. Steve Honeyman, EPOP's founder and director for more than a decade, started a number of community organizing groups in inner cities in the Northeast prior to initiating EPOP.³

EPOP's theory of change asserts that community transformation requires the development of deep and sustained relationships among community members through which they come to see their mutual self-interest in taking action together. In individual meetings called "one-to-ones," organizers identify community members with potential to play leadership roles in the organization and work with them to convene a larger group of parents, community residents, or congregation members to discuss concerns and set priorities. Organizers support the group's development through leadership training on EPOP's method of organizing. (See sidebar for EPOP's strategies for change.)

School-based campaigns

EPOP began school-based organizing as a way to draw community residents into campaigns focused on neighborhood improvement. Recruiting through the schools was a pragmatic response to the lack of institutions from which to launch organizing cam-

³ Until 2009, EPOP was affiliated with PICO, a national organizing network comprising fifty organizing groups in seventeen states. PICO trains local organizers and leaders in its organizing model via quarterly national trainings. Like most organizing groups, PICO groups identify issues of local concern and then use data, meetings with public officials, and rallies to push for change that will improve neighborhood conditions. PICO emphasizes the importance of building a "relational culture" through its organizing, in which members develop deep relationships with each other based on a sense of mutual accountability.

EPOP's Strategies for Effecting Change in the Community

Community Organizing brings people together to discover common ground and act effectively in their own interests, identifying and training potential leaders, and enlisting and nurturing the participation of a large number of residents in developing an agenda, devising strategies, and addressing local issues.

Institution-Based Organizing utilizes the particular history and values of the local church, school, or other institution as a base to organize people and resources.

Leadership Training is at the heart of our work. Teams of leaders at member institutions attend regular training, including an annual four-day retreat, utilizing adult education methods, reflection, and interactive role-playing exercises to strengthen skills of relationship building, power analysis, strategic planning, and action. Our goal is to develop and support a pool of powerful leaders working for social justice in our communities.

Source: Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project, n.d.

paings. Gordon Whitman, one of the group's original organizers, recalled that EPOP began organizing in schools as a way to find people.

You know, we don't have a church in this neighborhood, but there's a school. So why can't we get people together in the school and look at how to improve the neighborhood?

Against the backdrop of Philadelphia public schools' ongoing struggles, the schools where EPOP and YUC worked faced concentrated poverty, joblessness, and violent crime. These schools were located in neighborhoods that serve substantially higher percentages of low-income students of color relative to the district average. Tomás Hanna, a district official familiar with EPOP and former principal of Isaac A. Sheppard Elementary School, the site of EPOP's first school-based organizing in 1993, described the neighborhood as having

the highest number of murders of the city. . . . It was probably an area where the most drugs were being trafficked. . . . So you have parents who are living in a neighborhood that is struggling, economically speaking – probably a high unemployment rate and a high dropout rate.

Census data bear out these observations. For the census tracts surrounding the four elementary schools where EPOP focused its parent organizing, the median income was barely more than half that of Philadelphia as a whole. Most adults lacked a high school diploma and just under 50 percent of families lived in poverty (see Figure 3).

In 1993, drawing on the relational model that EPOP used in churches, organizers began holding individual meetings with potential parent leaders. EPOP first focused on reaching out to residents in blocks surrounding Sheppard Elementary School with the intention of building campaigns to address neighborhood problems. The most pressing issue facing Shep-

FIGURE 3

Characteristics of EPOP target schools' surrounding census tracts compared with all Philadelphia tracts

Characteristics Census tracts	Median Household Income	Families in Poverty	Adults 16+ in the Labor Force	Adults 25+ without a HS Diploma
Philadelphia	\$30,746	18.4%	55.5%	28.8%
EPOP school neighborhoods	\$15,840	48.2%	30.2%	55.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000

*“When you have this much parental involvement,
it’s imperative that you capture it.”*

—David Hornbeck, former schools superintendent

pard parents was safety, as the school was within view of several drug houses and shootings were frequent. Working with EPOP staff, parents convinced the police to increase the number of officers patrolling the area around the school. The Sheppard Parents Association, as the parent leaders called themselves, began to focus on needs within the school and won a district commitment to replace the roof and provide computer resources.

In an arc common across education organizing efforts, the initial focus on school climate problems progressed rapidly to deeper schooling issues. In their second year of organizing, parents mounted a successful campaign to provide a full-day kindergarten for Sheppard students, housed in a community center adjacent to the school. They then began to mobilize for more bilingual staff and a more effective reading curriculum. As the parents began to focus more closely on teaching and learning, some teachers began to feel threatened. Teachers took issue with parents’ complaints about low achievement and were concerned about parents’ growing influence in the school.

Gordon Whitman recalled this turn of events:

The school was this haven in a neighborhood that was really troubled. Within EPOP, there wasn’t this expectation that we were going to turn the school inside out. If you asked people about the school, a lot of what you got was positive stuff. But as we and the parents spent more time in the school, we realized that it was 98 percent Latino with only one bilingual teacher and two bilingual staff in the front office. No

one else spoke Spanish, so there was a lot of Spanish–English tension. After a while it was inevitable that we’d get into education issues and when we did, all hell broke loose.

Despite opposition from some teachers, parents continued to press their agenda. At a meeting in the spring of 1995 attended by about 150 parents, schools superintendent Hornbeck promised to find a bilingual reading specialist and to hire bilingual teachers for each grade level as positions opened. “When you have this much parental involvement, it’s imperative that you capture it,” Hornbeck told the *Philadelphia Daily News* (Moran 1995). But continuing tensions at Sheppard ultimately led parents to demand a new principal for the school. The organization developed an effective working relationship with the new principal, Tomás Hanna, who saw the organizing “as a vehicle to build relationships between teachers and parents.”

EPOP’s involvement at Sheppard evolved an approach to school-based organizing that defined the organization’s education work throughout the 1990s. EPOP organizers built committees of parent leaders at several other elementary schools, where campaigns focused on facilities, safety, after-school programs, and library resources. At McClure Elementary, parents again began organizing to improve school safety and quickly moved on to literacy and instructional quality. In an arc similar to Sheppard’s, conflict between teachers and parent leaders over parents’ demands eased with the selection of a new principal, who brought a focus on literacy. Parents and teachers worked together to refurbish the library and jointly selected a new librarian (Whitman 2003).

Because EPOP viewed parents as the primary school constituency to which it was accountable, the organization did not allow schools to become institutional members of EPOP. Organizers also did not insist on obtaining principal support before entering a school. Instead, EPOP organizers often intentionally developed supportive relationships with the school’s parent association – known in Philadelphia as the Home and School Association – to gain legitimacy

and access to the school and to build on the existing parent involvement in the school. In addition to school-based outreach, organizers also conducted outreach to parents through the membership of participating EPOP congregations.

EPOP's school-based organizing followed this pattern over the next decade. Some parent committees saw sustained activity and concrete victories; others ebbed and flowed (see Figure 4). Even when committees struggled to maintain momentum, EPOP's leadership development activities built awareness within the school community of the group's activities and focused school leadership on parents' concerns. The ability to sustain organizing campaigns often depended on cooperation from the school leader. The principals' openness to the accountability and performance demands that EPOP raised and the resulting congruence of vision – or at least passive agreement on priorities – between EPOP leaders and school principals were critical.

Collaborating with a principal: Willard Elementary

An example of this openness on the part of the principal is Willard Elementary, where years of leadership development with parents had generated relationships between EPOP and a core of teachers at the school. In 2005, the school received a new principal who was determined to improve the dilapidated and overcrowded conditions in the school building. She had learned about EPOP through a districtwide aspiring principals academy, in which EPOP participated, and sought the group's assistance.

Located in the Kensington neighborhood, the elementary school had 1,000 students on three sites (a main building and two annexes); 750 students on the main site shared two basement bathrooms. There was no gym, cafeteria, auditorium, or library. Teachers and parents described the building as rat-infested and poorly heated. Though the district had allocated resources for a new facility, no site had been selected. Willard parents believed that their school was being

FIGURE 4
EPOP's successful school-based campaigns, elementary and middle schools

School	Successful Campaigns
McClure Elementary	Safety improvements, reading program, new library resources
Sheppard Elementary	Safety improvements, computers, new roof, full-day kindergarten, bilingual teachers, library resources, after-school program; advocated for and helped select new principal
Taylor Elementary	Kitchen renovations, hot-lunch program, reading program, new playground
Willard Elementary	Safety improvements, facility repairs, new facility
Clemente Middle	Neighborhood safety improvements

“We needed to be able to influence policy and we couldn’t do that unless we had a citywide base.”

— Gordon Whitman, organizer, EPOP

neglected because of the poor neighborhood, while in the Center City district magnet schools were being built at a record pace.

At the principal’s request, EPOP organizers set about building a parent committee at the school, with the active involvement of teachers as well as of an EPOP member congregation in the surrounding neighborhood. The parent committee located a nearby site for a new school facility. They built consensus among city leaders on the location and brokered an agreement between the mayor’s office and school district officials on a purchase price. They also organized community forums and negotiating sessions with the district to make sure the deal with the city went through. The parent committee ultimately secured a commitment from Paul Vallas to fast track the development of a new school facility, and construction on the site began early in 2008.

District-level organizing

As the school-based work developed during the 1990s, EPOP expanded its focus to pursue district-level reforms. EPOP participated in the formation of the Alliance Organizing Project (AOP), a district-wide parent organizing effort implemented as part of Superintendent Hornbeck’s Children Achieving reform. The AOP received funding from the Annenberg Challenge grant that supported the Children Achieving reform agenda and was charged with organizing parent committees at schools across Philadelphia using a model similar to EPOP’s school-based work. In 1995, EPOP also helped to establish the Philadelphia chapter of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, an advocacy coalition of parent and community groups, teachers, district staff, and school reform groups. During and following the state takeover in 2001, EPOP joined AOP, YUC, and many other community groups in organizing against privatization.

The shift to district-level organizing led the organization to change its name from “Eastern Philadelphia” to “Eastern Pennsylvania” to mark its evolution toward a citywide organizing strategy and focus.

Gordon Whitman explained the emergent strategy:

The question was how do you move from local work? You do local problem-solving for seven or eight years and you kind of hit these walls where you can only hold the police captain and the principal and the sanitation department accountable for so long. You realize that there’s policy stuff, but from just one neighborhood you can’t really play in the policy world; it’s much harder. So if you want to be proactive, you have to think about how you have broader power. . . . We needed to be able to influence policy and we couldn’t do that unless we had a citywide base.

In 2001, EPOP joined with Temple University’s Center for Public Policy to create a joint research institution called Research for Democracy (RFD). Led by Whitman, the mission of RFD was to help community leaders use research to influence public policy because, said Whitman, “if you want to be at the policy table, you need to be able to bring research with you.” EPOP set RFD’s research agenda, and parent and community leaders helped shape the analysis and recommendations in each study. RFD produced a series of research reports on public schools, housing and blight, and immigration in Philadelphia.

In addition, EPOP and RFD jointly convened a weeklong national training for organizers and parent and youth leaders involved in education organizing to discuss their work and to hear from national experts on education reform.⁴ Between 2001 and 2003, approximately twenty community organizations nationally participated in three annual training sessions. These organizations included representatives from all five of the national organizing and unaffiliated groups.

The “Right to Know” campaign

In 2002, conversations among EPOP members revealed widespread confusion among parents and teachers during and following the state takeover and school privatization battles. Drawing on the issues identified in these conversations, EPOP and RFD designed and administered a telephone survey to 1,024 parents and 345 teachers to elicit the perspectives of both groups about communication and other issues in local schools (Axel-Lute 2003). RFD staff worked with EPOP leaders to analyze survey results, which showed substantial common ground between parents and teachers in their frustrations with local schools and lack of communication from district leaders regarding reform plans.

In September 2002, RFD issued *Right to Know*, a report presenting data from the telephone survey, along with a framework for improving the School District of Philadelphia. The opening paragraph read:

The purpose of this report is to help put parents, teachers, students, and other community members at the table where decisions are being made about public education in Philadelphia. For too long those who are most directly affected by school reform – parents, teachers, and students – have had limited input into education decisions. Reform has been imposed from above, with a resulting cycle of confusion, distrust, resistance, and unfulfilled expectations. (Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project, n.d.; Research for Democracy 2002)

In addition to recommendations for improving instruction, curriculum, and professional development, the report proposed measures to improve communication with parents. These included simplified report cards, regular reporting of data, and a *Right to*

“For too long those who are most directly affected by school reform – parents, teachers, and students – have had limited input into education decisions.”

— *Research for Democracy, Right to Know*

Know system to transform district and teacher communication with parents, students, and community members. “This new approach,” the report asserted, “would be anchored by a systemwide policy that sets specific standards around communication that apply to all schools, including neighborhood, privately managed, charter, and magnet schools” (Research for Democracy 2002).

Right to Know called on the district to make information available to parents on student performance, school performance, and teacher qualifications. It also called for improvements in parent–teacher communication through a new teacher voice-mail and e-mail system, teacher home-visits, and by specifying a time frame of forty-eight hours for teachers and parents to respond to each other’s messages.

The federal requirement for increased transparency to parents in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act amplified EPOP’s demands for reform. EPOP leaders presented the *Right to Know* recommendations to the school district’s newly appointed CEO Paul Vallas. Leaders and organizers believed that their extensive survey data would be convincing. Longtime EPOP leader Delores Shaw said:

We know by now that Vallas is very firm about not doing something that doesn’t have a firm body of research somewhere. There is national data backing up what we are saying, but Philly [is] a new set of challenges and being able to present him with [local] data was instrumental. (Axel-Lute 2003, p. 3)

⁴ The training institute – Organizing for Educational Excellence Institute – was sponsored by a consortium of funders including the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Edward W. Hazen, Hyams, Charles Stewart Mott, New World, Washington Mutual, and William Penn foundations (Corbin 2002).

“Who are we, showing up with thirty of us thinking we represent all the teenagers in this district?”

— *Rebecca Rathje, YUC founding director*

At a meeting attended by 500 EPOP members in 2002, Vallas agreed to implement the preliminary demands within a semester (Axel-Lute 2003). Under the agreement, the district would implement a new voice-mail system for teachers beginning with a pilot effort in forty-five schools. In the spring of 2003, the Vallas administration released a report on strategies for districtwide improvement. It included many of EPOP’s recommendations including simplified report cards, a regular schedule for reporting grades and test scores, and establishing voice mail for each teacher in the district (Rhodes 2003).

The *Right to Know* report guided a series of follow-up organizing efforts to improve the opportunity to learn in Philadelphia schools. In 2003, EPOP and RFD, with assistance from the Pennsylvania Education Law Center, investigated ways to leverage NCLB provisions on teacher quality to force the district to invest resources in the district’s highest-need schools. This research uncovered a district plan to redistribute Title I funds across Philadelphia schools. By lowering the required percentage of students in poverty to access funds, the new formula increased the number of schools eligible for Title I, thus reducing the total dollars to highest-needs schools. Faced with legal action by EPOP, RFD, and the Education Law Center, Vallas retracted the proposed funding formula and reached a compromise with EPOP on the allocation of funds.

Other efforts

By the mid-2000s, EPOP was involved in a variety of district- and school-level efforts. The organization also played a strong supporting role in YUC’s push for small schools (see the next section on YUC) and participated in a coalition focused on reducing teacher vacancies. During this period, EPOP faced a

number of internal challenges that constrained its education organizing capacity. Long-term health issues among senior staff and leaders and staff turnover, combined with the need to respond to the multitude of problems facing Philadelphia’s poorest neighborhoods, created an environment in which the momentum of education campaigns was difficult to maintain. This was true at the school level, where intensive staffing was required to develop parent leadership and support campaigns, as well as with districtwide campaigns. As a multi-issue organization, EPOP organizers were supporting campaigns to improve banking practices, neighborhood safety, and housing rehabilitation in addition to their work on education reform.

Despite these challenges, EPOP maintained a presence in the city on education issues in a more limited form. In 2004, EPOP responded to a series of high-profile shootings of city schoolchildren by holding a public meeting to demand action from city and school officials. The meeting led to a hearing by then-city council president Michael Nutter and to a daylong summit convened by EPOP in which education officials, city council members, police officials, and representatives of youth-serving city agencies came together to discuss the need for a systemwide approach to stem the violence.

During this period, EPOP also provided training on parent leadership and community engagement as part of a new academy for aspiring principals. EPOP’s role resulted from a longstanding relationship between EPOP and Tomás Hanna, who had been principal of Sheppard Elementary after EPOP’s campaign to remove the previous principal in the early 1990s. As the head of human resources for the district, Hanna invited EPOP leaders and organizers to share best practices for engaging parents with aspiring school principals. Hanna’s goal was to influence administrators’ conceptions about the “importance of recognizing parents, of understanding community, of incorporating the voices of students to your work.” From EPOP’s perspective, the sessions with principals provided an opportunity to develop relationships with new principals that would expand the organization’s access to schools.

Youth United for Change

Youth United for Change began in 1993 as a youth leadership project within a social service organization. Initial work focused on producing videos and a community newspaper to offer a youth perspective on education and community issues. The organization shifted to a power-building strategy after a crystallizing experience at a school board meeting. YUC founding director, Rebecca Rathje, recalled the moment:

We planned for months to address the school board and demand that they have a young person on the school board. . . . Our students were lined up to speak and the school board president gets up and leaves. So rather than say her speech, this one girl says, “What I want to know is, when the students of this district get up here, why does he get up and walk away?” [And when the board president returned, he said], “I heard that I was reprimanded for getting up and leaving. Well, I have been here since six o’clock in the morning. I don’t get paid to do this, and if I have to get up for a minute . . . that’s none of your business. And as for your request, I’ve got 215,000 students in my district, why should I listen to a handful of you?”

The board president’s remarks sparked a shift in the organization’s thinking. Rathje observed:

We left and we did some real soul searching. . . . And [the youth] said, “He’s right. Who are we, showing up with thirty of us thinking we represent all the teenagers in this district?” That was when we were ready to move and change the structure.

The group settled on a model of high school chapters that would recruit youth to work on school-based campaigns and come together for mutual support. YUC staff began recruiting students at Kensington and Olney high schools, where staff had previously developed relationships with school faculty. YUC received initial mentoring from Youth Force, a

YUC School-Based Campaigns

YUC campaigns are typically characterized by the following cycle of activities:

- Recruitment through classroom presentations and flyering;
- Training on YUC’s organizing method and beliefs;
- Group meetings to discuss and prioritize schooling issues of concern;
- Outreach through schoolwide surveys and listening campaigns to assess the scope of the issue and its resonance with the larger student body;
- Research to gather information on reform alternatives and to define a strategy for engaging school officials;
- Presenting reform recommendations to school and district officials and conducting monthly follow-up meetings to share concerns and monitor progress on implementation of agreed-upon reforms.

youth-led organizing group in New York City, as well as from EPOP. They later joined EPOP as a dues-paying member.

YUC’s initial work focused largely at the school level, and school-based chapters led campaigns in five large, low-performing high schools. Fifteen years after its inception, YUC now works at both the school and district levels. The dual focus enables the organization to pursue larger and more transformative changes in the quality of educational opportunity in YUC neighborhoods. Young people have led successful campaigns on a wide variety of district and local issues and built a base of close to 1,500 card-carrying members.

School-based campaigns

YUC’s school-based model consists of recruiting students into chapters that meet after school to identify schooling problems and develop and lead reform campaigns. A YUC organizer is assigned to each school to assist youth leaders in conducting a survey of their peers to identify problems and in designing reform campaigns. Though group meetings generally occur after school, key tasks – such as outreach, recruitment, and surveying – are often carried out by students during school hours.

FIGURE 5

YUC's successful school-based campaigns, high schools

High School	Successful Campaigns
Kensington (began 1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional school aides • Additional school supplies and textbooks, clean water fountains • Principal's agreement to eliminate general math and general science in favor of college preparatory curricula • New after-school programs • Creation of Youth/Community/School task force • New small schools of no more than 400 students • Participation of Concordia Associates in community design process for new small schools • Construction of facility for fourth small school
Olney (began 1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra police outside during entry and dismissal, extra officer inside building • Participation in community task force on safety and facilities issues • Conflict-resolution workshops • Building renovations • \$50,000 for technology resources • College and Career Center • Additional instructional aide to extend library hours • Teacher–student alliance to strengthen multicultural education • Creation of two small schools to replace large high school
Edison (began 1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing positive school culture—building days • Lights and regular patrols for a crime-ridden bridge under which many students passed
Strawberry Mansion (began 2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building renovations (heating, windows, roof, bathrooms) • Full-time certified librarian and multicultural books • Commitment that test preparation would take place outside of instructional hours (school-based campaign led to districtwide victory)
Mastbaum (began 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$40,000 for in-school suspension program

Youth leaders from YUC chapters gather once a month to discuss crosscutting issues and potential district-level campaigns and provide feedback and guidance on each other's local campaigns. The organization also provides training in intensive weekend retreats and its annual weeklong Summer Leadership Institute.

School-level campaigns have produced a wide variety of reforms including: increased student access to rigorous curriculum, expanded access to counseling so that students receive information on the coursework necessary to graduate and be eligible for college, new resources for libraries, facilities improvements, additional and updated supplies and textbooks, and new computers and Internet access for classrooms. The results of school-level organizing campaigns are listed in Figure 5.

Toward the latter part of the 1990s, YUC's organizing model expanded from school-based organizing to reflect a deepening analysis of the scale of reform needed to improve local high schools. Despite the organization's success in securing a wide variety of commitments on issues ranging from school facilities to academic curriculum, organizers and leaders were increasingly frustrated that their victories were not producing the school quality that members had envisioned. Director Andi Perez explained:

I think there's the warm, fuzzy belief that if kids have heat, they'll go to school, right? We can justify that. Did we get textbooks distributed? Yes. Did we get a certified librarian? Do all of those things help create a high-quality education? Yup. But they're not enough. There's still a 70 percent dropout rate in the Latino community in Kensington.

YUC chapters faced the recurring challenge of principal turnover in schools. Over the course of YUC's history with Olney, for example, the school went through eight principals. In addition, there was a constant need to monitor campaign victories to make sure that reforms were not watered down during implementation. These challenges forced YUC to reexamine its underlying theory of action. A more

“Fighting for an in-school suspensions policy is really nice, but it's not going to improve the quality of education at Mastbaum. . . . How can we really have a long-term effect on education reform in the schools that we're at?”

— Andi Perez, director, YUC

systemic strategy was needed if they were going to substantially improve outcomes in their neighborhoods. Perez said:

Fighting for an in-school suspensions policy is really nice, but it's not going to improve the quality of education at Mastbaum High School. Is it a worthy cause? Absolutely. Is it a good first campaign in a school? Yes, it is. But now what? How can we really have a long-term effect on education reform in the schools that we're at?

The 2001 state takeover of the district's governance presented an opportunity for YUC to participate in districtwide organizing. Participation in a coalition effort against the state's district privatization proposal helped YUC to forge relationships with a range of advocacy and school reform groups. Two school-reform support organizations, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and Research for Action, helped leaders and organizers delve more deeply into the reform issues at stake in the privatization proposal. Collaboration on student protests at the state capital and in Philadelphia led to a lasting alliance with another youth organizing group, Philadelphia Student Union (PSU). Together, the two organizations began searching for ways to catalyze a deeper and more powerful transformation of high school education in their communities.

“[They] had a lot of freedom and they were learning. . . . We need small schools because in a large school it’s harder to get your work done and get what you need to go to college.”

— Marcella Gibbs, YUC leader

The small schools campaign

In 2002, under the leadership of Paul Vallas, the district announced plans to invest \$1.5 million in a capital campaign to replace and renovate school facilities and to expand high school options by adding new, themed high schools of 800 to 1,000 students. YUC’s Kensington chapter responded by advocating for their school to be included on the list of schools prioritized for facilities repairs. YUC led Vallas on a tour of the Kensington campus and convinced him to add the school to the list for a new building.

Though Vallas’s commitment was only to create a new facility for the school, YUC leaders saw the opportunity afforded by a new facility to completely recreate the educational environment at the school. The Kensington chapter leaders embarked on a “listening campaign” to gather students’ ideas for how the school might be restructured and improved.

With this input, YUC created a vision of a campus of small, autonomous schools that would share facilities but would each have its own theme, faculty, administration, curriculum, and governance structure (Suess & Lewis 2005). Together with PSU members from West Philadelphia High School, the student leaders began researching small schools in other cities. With assistance from Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, youth visited small schools in Chicago. By early 2003, the YUC Kensington chapter had developed a proposal to break up Kensington High School into separate, autonomous schools (Davis 2004).

At the time, Kensington housed more than 1,400 students. Citing the research on effective small schools, the YUC argued that the new small schools should be restricted to no more than 400 students. Truly small schools would be “better in all aspects of education, such as teacher quality and having personal relationships with the principal,” YUC leader Jennifer Howell told the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* (Suess & Lewis 2005).

During the next two years, YUC youth leaders and organizers conducted extensive research, traveling to Oakland, Rhode Island, and New York City to observe various small schools models, again with assistance from Cross City Campaign and Research for Action. In Rhode Island, youth leaders visited the highly regarded Metropolitan Career and Technical Center. YUC leader Marcella Gibbs recalled:

It was nicely done. They had a lot of freedom and they were learning. . . . We need small schools because in a large school it’s harder to get your work done and get what you need to go to college. (Dean 2005a)

Locally, YUC along with PSU began to actively seek support for the small schools effort from a wide variety of influential Philadelphia organizations, including Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, EPOP, Research for Action, and the teachers union. These organizations endorsed the small schools effort and worked with the youth leaders to draft a proposal for a new district policy on small schools. Working closely with EPOP, YUC and PSU also reached out to elected officials in the city to inform them about the need for dramatic action to transform high school education in the city.

In Kensington, YUC proposed replacing the large school with four new schools – three of which would be located on the original Kensington High School site and one in a new building. YUC identified a site for the fourth Kensington small school and secured an agreement from the current owner to hold the site for the new small school. It also pushed for a transparent public planning process to guide the high school transition, convincing the district to include a range of community groups including Aspira, the

Norris Square Civic Association, the New Kensington CDC, and the Lighthouse, a local community center, in the planning team charged with designing the new Kensington facility.

In June 2005, after a year of negotiations, YUC won a public commitment before 250 students and community leaders from Chief Academic Officer Craig Thornton. The commitment was not only to YUC's vision of creating four small high schools to serve the Kensington community, but also to the creation of a public planning process for the school's redesign. With funding from the William Penn Foundation, Concordia Associates (a community planning, design, and architecture group) was hired to manage the design process and to maximize public participation.

YUC leaders participated on the steering committee guiding the public participation process and helped generate a vision statement for the new small schools called the Kensington Community Mandate. The mandate included recommendations for the new schools' governance, scheduling, curriculum, student support services, partnerships, and facilities sharing. YUC's role was openly acknowledged by steering committee participants; the committee's final report opened with an acknowledgment of the central role YUC played in "working to improve the quality of education at Kensington High School" (Concordia 2006).

In September 2005, three small, theme-based schools opened on the Kensington campus.⁵ Construction of the facility for the fourth school began three years later in 2008. The themes of the new small schools –

⁵ The three small schools that make up the current Kensington High School are Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA); International Business, Finance, and Entrepreneurship (Business); and Culinary Arts. Culinary Arts is housed in the Annex, while CAPA shares the main building with Business. Students attending the old Kensington High School were given the choice of which small school to attend. (Unlike in other districts, Kensington High School was not phased out; instead, students were transferred from the large high school into the new small schools.)

"We're organizing community organizations to be a consistent voice in that reform, understanding that along with the research that small schools is better comes research that community engagement makes schools better."

— Andi Perez, director, YUC

performing arts, business, and culinary arts – were proposed by YUC students based on the results of their survey and listening campaign.

The small schools work heralded a shift for the organization in several distinct ways. The focus on structural and systemic issues led the organization to develop multiyear campaigns, rather than campaigns structured around the academic school year that had been YUC's *modus operandi* for almost a decade. Andi Perez noted, "It's a little bit more complex now because we're talking about issues that are taking longer periods of time, but also have a greater impact on reform." As part of these new longer-term campaigns, YUC began to deliberately cultivate relationships with powerful organizations in Philadelphia, including the city's labor unions.

YUC also began to conceive of its role in schools as ongoing participant rather than a largely external accountability role. Perez recalled:

It used to be YUC's agenda that you go, you negotiate, you have your action. Now, we've become interested in keeping the small school [rooted in] a community agenda, so we're not just organizing community organizations to support YUC, we're organizing community organizations to be a consistent voice in that reform, understanding that along with the research that small schools is better comes research that community engagement makes schools better.

A schoolwide survey by YUC revealed test-taking improprieties at the school as well as student dissatisfaction with the school's practice of pulling students from core subject courses for intensive test preparation.

As a result, YUC began to integrate more political education for its members into its activities, helping them to situate their school reform campaigns within a larger analysis of community change.

YUC chapters continued to develop school-based campaigns throughout the period of the small schools work. Chapters led campaigns to institute a new discipline and suspension policy at Olney High School. At one high school, student complaints about testing and test-preparation practices led YUC youth leaders to build a campaign to reform the district's practices.

High-stakes testing

In 2005, a schoolwide survey conducted by the Strawberry Mansion chapter of YUC revealed test-taking improprieties at the school – teachers completing blank answers for students, tests administered in classrooms with instructional aids on the walls – as well as student dissatisfaction with the school's practice of pulling students from core subject courses for intensive test preparation. Students produced a report documenting their peers' concerns and recommendations for improvement, met with district administrators, and presented testimony to the Philadelphia School Reform Commission (Snyder 2006). YUC's organizing resulted in the district's adoption of a new set of standards. In a 2006 press release, the school district noted that "incorporating suggestions from YUC, the District is updating [its standardized testing] practices."

Al Bichner, deputy chief academic officer in charge of high schools, described YUC's role in bringing standardized testing concerns to the district's attention:

YUC came to the district with concerns on behalf of students regarding test preparations and urged for a policy that ensured that all test preparations are outside of the normal school day. They realized that good teaching is good preparation for testing, but understood that specialized test preparation should exist outside of the normal school day. So they've just recently met with Dr. Gregory Thornton, my boss, the chief academic officer. I participated in a press conference with them as Dr. Thornton announced the policy that ensured that the standardized test preparation was an activity that would extend beyond the regular school day.

Among the new practices, the district agreed to post testing procedures in all schools, extend test preparation opportunities to all students, limit specific test preparation classes to elective or noninstructional hours, and guarantee that all confidentiality guidelines were met to ensure that individual test scores remain anonymous (School District of Philadelphia 2006).

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF EPOP'S AND YUC'S ORGANIZING

Our research examined EPOP's and YUC's education organizing activities, including their facilities and resources campaigns, EPOP's Right to Know campaign, and YUC's small schools work. Specific questions guiding our research were:

- To what extent do educators attribute EPOP's and YUC's education organizing with influencing district and municipal policy and resource decisions in support of low-performing schools?
- To what extent has EPOP's and YUC's work influenced the capacity of schools to educate student successfully?
- To what extent has EPOP's and YUC's work produced measurable gains in student outcomes?

Analytic Approach

Drawing on our initial year of fieldwork, we defined indicators of change in school capacity relevant to EPOP's and YUC's reform efforts. In most cases, available administrative data did not coincide with the indicators that EPOP and YUC aimed to influence. Organizing campaigns that focused on improving aspects of school culture, resources, and organization were often not directly measurable through the administrative data collected by the state and district. In addition, data were either missing or not available for several of the schools involved in EPOP and YUC campaigns.

Using data that were available, we conducted descriptive analyses to assess trends in relation to each organization's work. Because of the small number of schools that were directly involved in the organizing, we did not conduct predictive analyses of EPOP's and YUC's influence on school capacity and student outcomes.

Data Collected

Our analysis draws primarily on interviews with organization staff and district officials, as well as on press accounts of the groups' activities. Administrative data were collected for each of four elementary schools, one middle school, and five high schools targeted by the two organizations.

FINDINGS

Interviews with education officials suggested that EPOP's and YUC's organizing influenced district priorities and resource allocations, particularly regarding parent involvement, standardized testing, school discipline, small high school reform, and the distribution of federal Title I funds. School-based organizing generated new parent and youth leadership in schools and stimulated a variety of school-specific improvements. On one campus, the organizations' joint work to reform a large failing high school led to the creation of four new, theme-based high schools, with promising early results.

“EPOP steps in and says, ‘Wait a minute now, you know it’s a community problem. And we represent the community, so you’ve got to pay attention to this.’”

— An aide to a Philadelphia city council member

EPOP: Influence on District Capacity

EPOP is widely credited with increasing resource equity in the Philadelphia public schools and expanding district communication with parents and district support for parent involvement in schools, even as officials acknowledged the internal challenges the organization faced. District leaders described the organization as genuinely representing low-income families from some of the most economically and racially isolated neighborhoods in the city. As one city council aide noted, EPOP consistently drew attention to the city's neediest students.

You hear about Vallas and other people caring about the school kids and I'm sure that they do care about the kids who want to be in school and want to learn. They don't really care a whole lot about the kids who don't want to learn or those restless kids, the criminal element. I don't believe they view them as their problem. And that's a place where EPOP steps in and says, “Wait a minute now, you know it's a community problem. And we represent the community, so you've got to pay attention to this.”

EPOP's leadership development efforts generated forceful and persistent demands for increased district communication, transparency, and accountability to parents. Our analyses indicated that EPOP influenced public officials' perceptions of how to support parent involvement and helped protect resources flowing to schools in its target neighborhoods.

Low-income schools across the city, many of which had been waiting years for renovations, had been put on the back burner while construction exploded in the Center City region.

Policies and resources

Senior district and municipal officials identified EPOP's work in the area of parent involvement as its most significant impact on central office. EPOP's advocacy through its Right to Know campaign pushed the district to create school-based parent support rooms and help desks, provide information to parents, and implement a new system to facilitate ongoing teacher–parent communication. District CEO Paul Vallas observed increased communication between the district and parents and attributed this shift to “EPOP's influence [and] desire for us to communicate – to make the schools more accessible to parents and increase the communications between the classroom and parents.”

Several district leaders observed that EPOP's vision of parent involvement went beyond expanded capacity for effective communication. District officials cited the inclusion of EPOP's parent and community engagement practices in the district's training for aspiring principals as an example of the new understanding among administrators that EPOP helped develop. Led by EPOP staff and leaders, these sessions were designed to challenge educators' misconceptions about parent and community involvement and to provide them with concrete strategies to improve school/parent/community relationships.

An official involved with the aspiring principals academy explained that EPOP organizers helped resident principals explore

how we can establish a parent voice in the school – even if the parents, because of work, can't physically be there, how we can involve them through daily-grams and weekly bulletins

and letters going home. . . . Parent involvement doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be in the school. It means that parents need to be aware of the schools their children are sent to, of the programs that are there. So it's all about communication with the families about programs and student progress. I think that's how the [aspiring principals] are seeing this. What can they do as future principals to encourage the parent involvement piece? That's what the big takeaway was.

EPOP succeeded in securing a commitment for a new school building for Willard, even though the district was facing budget difficulties and, as many school advocates believed, other areas of the city were being favored for new construction. Patricia Raymond, president of the district's citywide umbrella parent organization called Home and School Council, told the *Philadelphia Daily News* that low-income schools across the city, many of which had been waiting years for renovations, had been put on the back burner while construction exploded in the Center City region. “We are hearing that all over the place,” Raymond said of leaders' complaints of inequitable treatment. “It's turning out to be the haves and the have-nots.” EPOP's support through public actions and extensive negotiations was crucial in securing the new building that Willard had been promised in 1998.

Accountability to the community

EPOP's role in pushing for reform, often through large community meetings with extensive media coverage, was viewed by district leaders as a positive and necessary force for change. EPOP's persistent involvement in the Philadelphia public schools for more than a decade maintained pressure on the district to acknowledge and respond to community concerns.

Describing EPOP as a “great watchdog in the community,” Lucy Rodriguez-Feria, a regional superintendent, observed:

They're very well known in the district. For example, EPOP was instrumental about two years ago when the district took Title I dollars

and distributed them across the region, across the district, as opposed to where the students in highest-poverty schools were. [The district] tried to spread some of the funds and EPOP said, “Oh no, those funds are very specific for the kids in poverty in order to level out and have an even feel and for there to be equity.” And so . . . that decision had to be reversed because they were absolutely watching that those kinds of things just don’t happen.

Parents’ presence at EPOP meetings, their roles in leading meetings and presenting reform proposals, added to the organization’s perceived legitimacy by school and system officials. Vallas noted the contrast with “a lot of the school reform groups that are not always led by individuals who are actually from the community.” Information that EPOP leaders presented at community meetings offered Vallas a feedback loop that helped him gain a clearer picture of problems in the district. He observed that

bureaucracies have a tendency to try to limit the flow of bad news and increase the flow of good news. . . . I need access. I need to get information through nontraditional ways. And these groups . . . provide me with that access.

Debra Kahn, former Philadelphia secretary of education, offered a supporting view:

Whether it’s issues in schools or housing or anything else, there’s what the very well intentioned, capable, and in some cases extraordinary policy and program folks do in government. But you also then have to hear how it’s really playing and working at the grassroots, whether it’s classroom, the street corner, whatever. So I think that these groups always help shape the discussion, add insights that people in government or in businesses or anywhere else can’t have, don’t have. That back and forth is really critical.

Parents’ presence at EPOP meetings, their roles in leading meetings and presenting reform proposals, added to the organization’s perceived legitimacy by school and system officials.

YUC: Influence on District Capacity

Among public officials in Philadelphia, YUC is widely credited with providing persistent and resourceful leadership to the high school reform movement, work that has begun to generate improved student outcomes on the Kensington High School campus. The organization was also consistently described as a credible and highly effective vehicle for students to have an impact on school reform issues. Educators interviewed believed YUC has developed a constructive working relationship with district and municipal leaders that has achieved considerable impact.

Our data indicated that YUC’s district-level work influenced the district’s school reform strategy for the Kensington campus and shaped new district policies regarding testing and test-preparation activities. The organization’s work also influenced district officials’ perceptions of the benefits of student engagement in schools and school reform activities.

Policies and resources

Like EPOP, YUC was viewed as an ardent advocate for equity. Through their school-based campaigns, YUC secured vital building renovations; library, technology, and textbook resources; and funds for the creation of college counseling centers. The district’s embrace of YUC’s plan to break Kensington into four schools of 400 to 500 students, and to construct a new facility for one small school, was a major achievement amid budget cuts and a district policy of creating larger schools of 800 to 1,000 students.

“When we sit with YUC and other groups and listen, a lot of what they’re saying makes sense.

Do we always agree on things? No. But I have learned not to take it personally.”

— Tomás Hanna, district administrator and former principal of Kensington High School

Every educator we interviewed credited YUC with catalyzing and maintaining the district’s focus on small (400-seat) high schools as a core reform strategy for high school education in Philadelphia. Tomás Hanna, the district administrator who had been principal of Sheppard Elementary and later of Kensington High School, noted:

The work YUC has been doing, in fact, has scaled up to the point where they are talking about [us] as a district moving to reform high schools – go[ing] from behemoth high schools that have 1,800 to 2,400 to 3,000 kids to smaller campuses. We’ve been engaged in a dialogue in terms of what those schools need to look like programmatically and in terms of content. I think their impact has been very noticeable.

Al Bichner, the deputy chief academic officer in charge of high schools and a frequent negotiator with YUC, described the group as a “critical, major voice” and a “partner” in the transformation effort. Paul Vallas observed that

[YUC has] been largely responsible for the shape those schools are taking. We’ve really listened to them, we’ve involved them in the process, and we’ve sometimes deferred to them. They’ve been very influential in the redesign of [Kensington].

Officials also cited as key to their decision to adopt small schools as part of the secondary school reform strategy YUC’s work to research the effectiveness of small schools nationally, to build allies within the broader Philadelphia school reform community and among elected officials, and to frame the initiative as meeting district educational goals.⁶ Lucy Rodriguez-Feria, the regional superintendent, recalled:

YUC was always at the table. They’ve always supported small schools. They wanted to ensure that it would really happen in Philadelphia. They’ve traveled the country; we’ve traveled with them on some occasions. They had ideas about format; they had ideas about numbers. They had done really extensive research. . . . Not just with the visits, but also with all that they helped organize before they got the Philadelphia Education Fund and the district involved.

Accountability to the community

Educators also viewed the school chapter model of organizing practiced by YUC as an important vehicle for young people, particularly those not usually represented on traditional youth leadership structures, to share their concerns with educators. As Hanna observed:

YUC is not creaming. They’re not going to magnet schools to recruit. . . . They are taking the students from comprehensive high schools with all of their associated challenges and building on their strengths.

District leaders also valued YUC’s organizing because it stimulated increased youth investment in their schools. This investment helped high schools to be more effective, above and beyond the impact of YUC campaigns on schools. As a former principal, Bichner said:

I can tell you, regardless of the school I’ve been at, it’s really important to have student voice. In high school, students are young adults and – I don’t want to be too conservative, but we’re

trying to prepare kids for society and for adult life. When you get the buy-in and the voice of the students and they genuinely hear that you're listening to them, I think there is a better chance that policies and programs that you want to implement are going to be successful because [students] stand ready to support them with you.

YUC maintained a consistent presence in district-level arenas, speaking at school board and School Reform Commission meetings and holding private meetings with regional and district officials. Bichner described these monthly interactions with YUC as “very polite and very respectful. YUC leaders make strong points, but they always speak in turn, they speak politely, they come thoroughly prepared.” In some cases, this engagement with YUC had a transformative impact on how administrators viewed their communications with community constituencies. Tomás Hanna said:

I honestly think that in a large system we need to make room for divergent views. We think, hey, we've thought this out – we've been there. And when we sit with YUC and other groups and listen, a lot of what they're saying makes sense. I think their work has made us consider the customer more – their questions about what's going on inform our planning. Do we always agree on things? No. But I have learned not to take it personally. I've learned that from YUC, EPOP, and other groups. I have learned to be very up-front and very honest.

Like EPOP, YUC gained legitimacy because of its role in bringing a long-silenced constituency to the table. The organization's work also tapped educators' personal commitments to young people's success and, in combination with YUC's careful organiza-

“[YUC has] been largely responsible for the shape those schools are taking. We've really listened to them, we've involved them in the process, and we've sometimes deferred to them.”

— Paul Vallas, former superintendent, Philadelphia

tional style, increased educators' openness to youth leaders' demands. Former secretary of education Debra Kahn observed that

engaging with youth doesn't mean that students are the only voice we need to listen to in this very complicated world of school reform, but . . . [they are] a critical voice that gets ignored way too much and I think the results are the results we have.

EPOP: Implications for School Capacity and Student Learning

Interviews with district leaders suggested that the most consistent and significant school-level impact of EPOP's work is in parent engagement and strengthened school–community relationships. Educators noted instances where EPOP's leadership development sessions increased the confidence and skills of parents to interact with school staff and administrators and vice versa. Reflecting the sentiments of many interviewees, regional superintendent Lucy Rodriguez-Feria observed:

They help with parent leadership, developing parents around how do you access schools. How do you get your voice at the table? How do you become a part of the Home and School Association?

⁶ Small learning communities were not new to Philadelphia. The concept was introduced during the early 1990s but failed to gain traction in the face of opposition from the teachers union.

In addition, administrator mobility within the district helped spread EPOP's parent engagement practices to other schools beyond those directly involved with the organization.

Interviews with educators and EPOP staff and leaders suggested EPOP's school-based work targeted critical issues and produced new resources and relationships (see Figure 4, page 13). Hanna described the impact of EPOP's involvement at Sheppard Elementary:

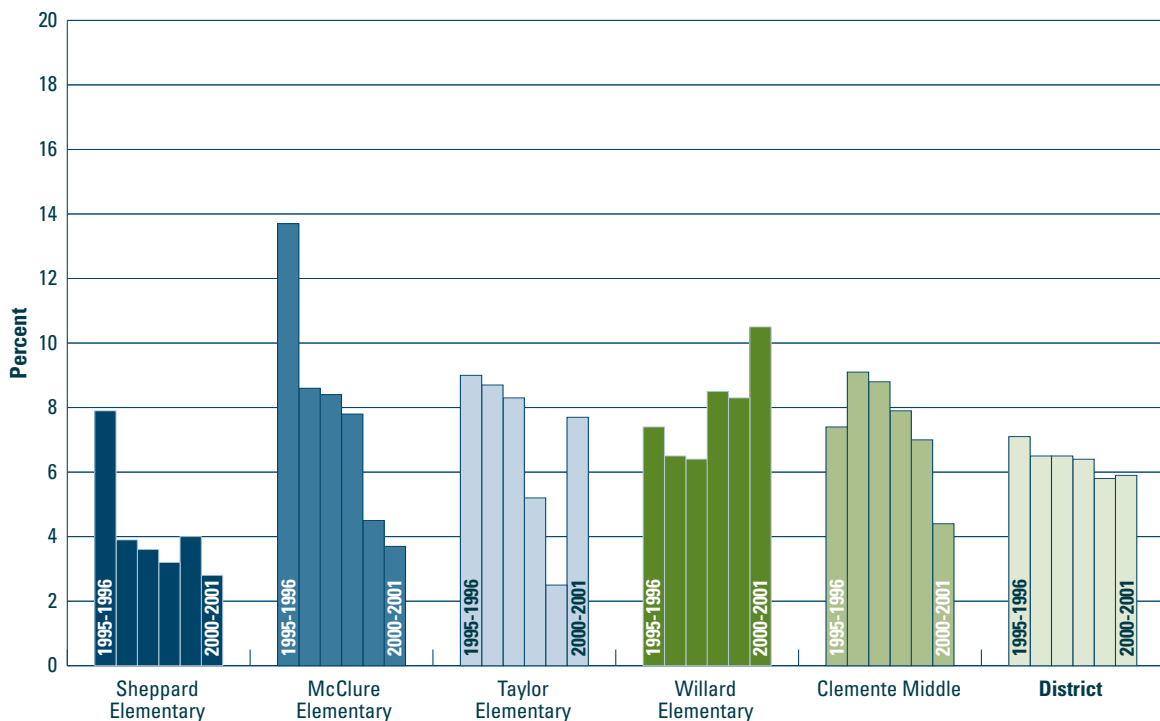
What ended up happening is that we addressed issues with students. . . . We were removing graffiti, getting students into uniforms, engaging parents, and improving attendance of both students and staff. We were meeting the needs of parents as well as of the students in the com-

munity and students started going home and saying, "Look, things are really different." And the fights were reduced and it became a better school – one where teachers could teach and students could learn. [See Figure 6.]

Our research framework posits that intermediary changes, such as improved teacher morale, are a precursor to improved student learning. Without pre-2000 data, we could not assess trends in student learning. Interviews with EPOP staff suggested that leadership and staff turnover in schools, combined with a tumultuous district context of recurring budget shortfalls, state takeover, and privatization efforts, made it difficult to sustain improvement over time.

FIGURE 6

Percentage of teachers absent for personal reasons, elementary schools involved with EPOP, 1995-1996 to 2000-2001



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Pennsylvania School Profiles Archives, <www.paprofiles.org/pa0001/archives.htm>

Note: District data include elementary, middle, and high schools.

YUC: Implications for School Capacity and Student Learning

Interviews with organizers, in addition to media reports and other documentation, provided evidence that YUC's school-based organizing introduced a wide variety of reforms in schools during the early period of its work. As with EPOP, our analyses of school capacity are constrained by the lack of administrative data prior to 2000. Nonetheless, post-2000 data provided evidence of a vastly improved learning environment on the Kensington campus.

These findings are consistent with accounts provided by district officials who were directly involved with the high school reform. For example, Al Bichner observed that YUC's organizing strengthened student engagement in schools. This engagement not only

brought problems to the district's attention but also built greater investment among students in the reform effort. Bichner said:

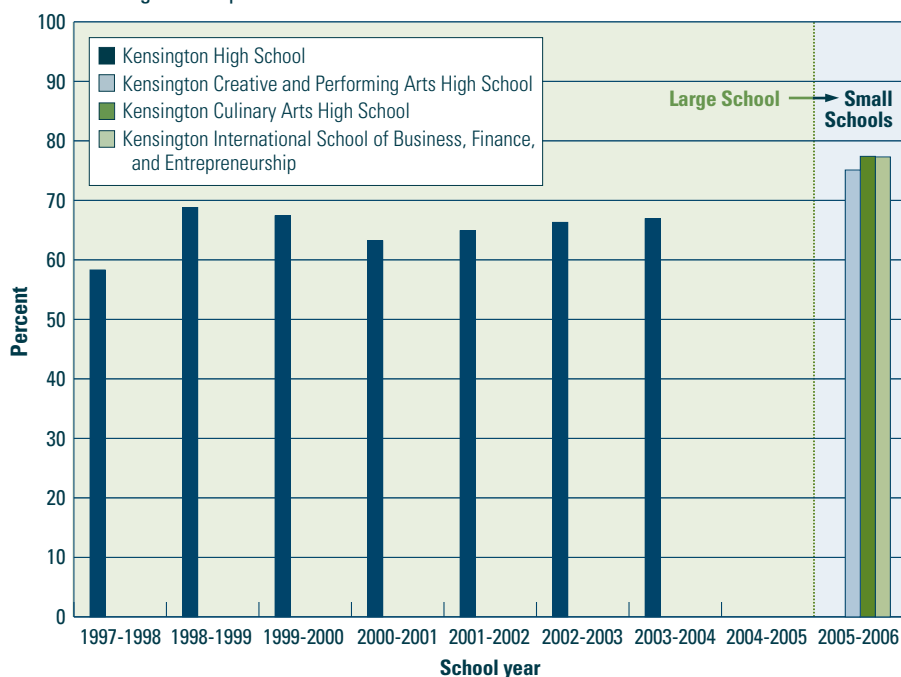
Students were buying into those changes and accepting them. When you're talking about issues of school climate and school discipline, when students understand that decisions that are being made are in their best interest, I think it really [interacts] with school climate. In fact [YUC is] also helping us there with things like clubs and activities and getting them going to benefit the school climate.

Though the Kensington small high schools have been operating for less than two years, administrative data indicate an improving school climate and stronger student engagement. The new small schools

are serving a population that is demographically similar to that served by the former large high school, yet they appear to be fostering higher student attendance. New small schools on the Kensington campus show a 10 percent average increase in student attendance in 2005-2006, compared with student attendance in the large high school in 2003-2004 (see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7

Average daily student attendance, Kensington High School vs. new small schools on Kensington campus



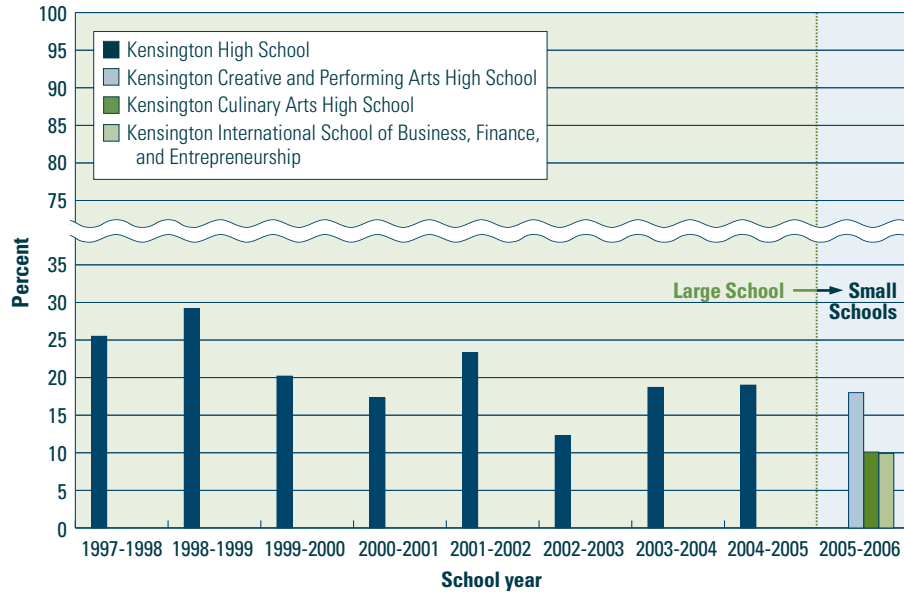
Data source, 1997-1998 to 2000-2001: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Pennsylvania School Profiles Archives, <www.paprofiles.org/pa0001/archives.htm>. Attendance rate is calculated by dividing Aggregate Days Attendance by the Aggregate Days Membership.

Data source, 2001-2002 to 2005-2006: School District of Philadelphia, Regional Offices and School Information, <<https://sdp-webprod.phila.k12.pa.us/OnlineDirectory/schools.jsp>>. Average daily attendance is calculated from student records on the School Computer Network, used by schools to report student attendance, suspensions, and other student information such as race and gender.

Note: Data are unavailable for 2004-2005. Data from Kensington High School for 2003-2004 and earlier years are no longer posted on the Pennsylvania Department of Education Web site.

FIGURE 8

Dropout rates, Kensington High School vs. new small schools on Kensington campus

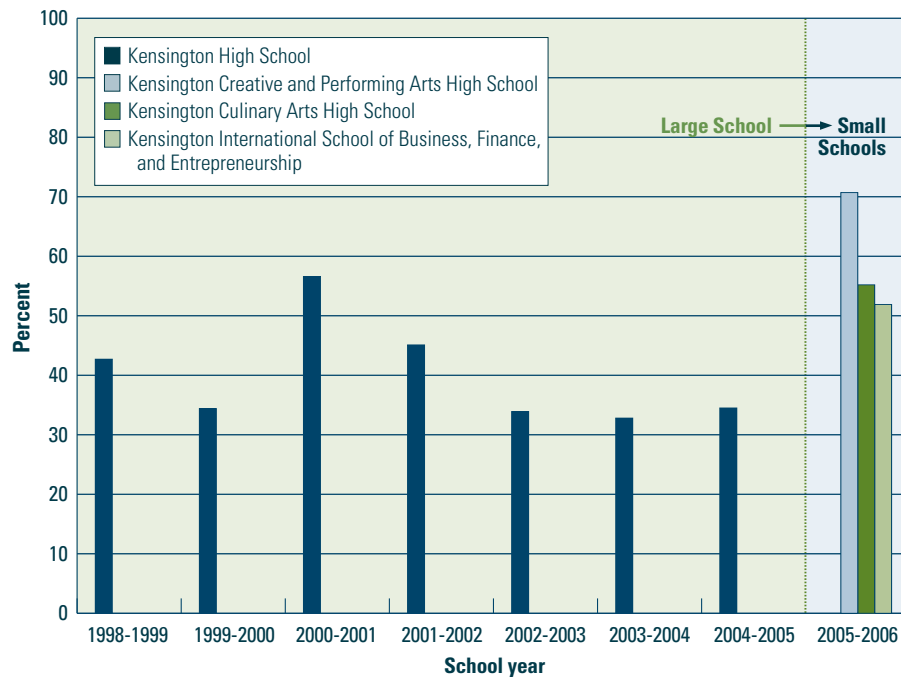


Data source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Data Services, Pre-K–12 School Statistics, Public Secondary School Dropouts by School, <www.pde.state.pa.us/k12statistics/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=125758&k12Nav=1146>

Similarly, the new small schools show positive trends in student dropout rates, PSSA scores in math and reading, and the number of students who identify as college bound (see Figures 8–11). Two of the small schools, Kensington Culinary Arts and the Kensington International School of Business, Finance, and Entrepreneurship, appear to be particularly effective. The less-impressive performance of Kensington Creative and Performing Arts may result from the way students are distributed among the three schools.

FIGURE 9

Percentage of graduates who identify as college bound, Kensington High School vs. new small schools on Kensington campus

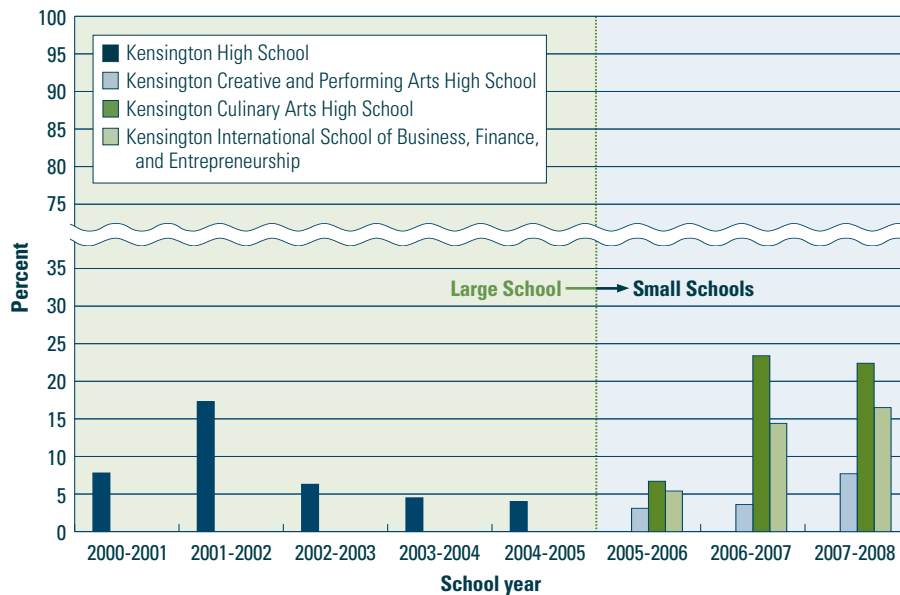


Data source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Data Services, Pre-K–12 School Statistics, Public High School Graduates and Postsecondary Education Rates, <www.pde.state.pa.us/k12statistics/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=125758&k12Nav=1146>

Note: The Pennsylvania Department of Education defines college bound high school graduates as those planning to enroll in a two- or four-year degree-granting college or university, or a specialized associate degree-granting institution.

FIGURE 10

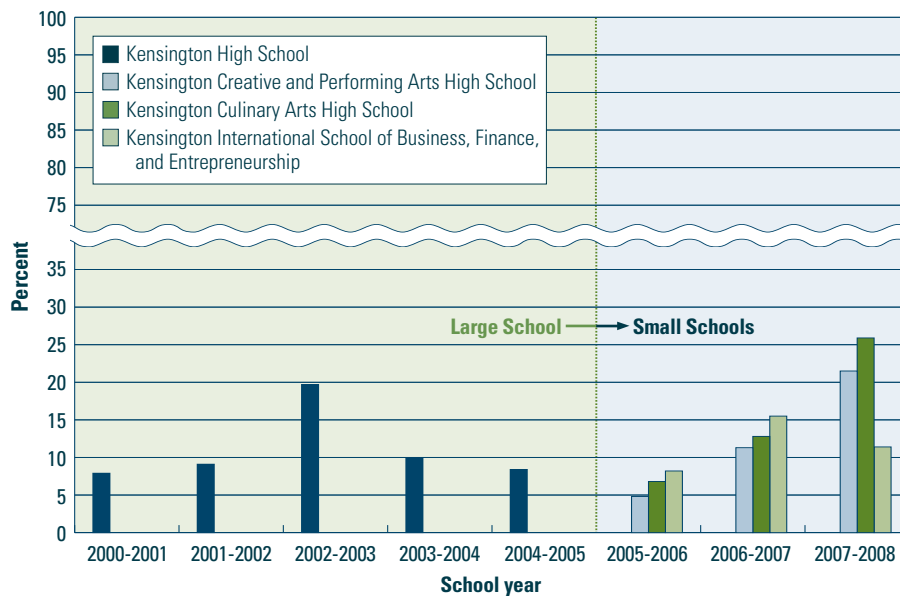
Percentage of students proficient on math PSSA, Kensington High School vs. new small schools on Kensington campus



Data source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Accountability and Assessment, Division of Assessment, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) Performance Levels, <www.pde.state.pa.us/a_and_t/cwp/browse.asp?a=3&bc=0&c=27525>

FIGURE 11

Percentage of students proficient on reading PSSA, Kensington High School vs. new small schools on Kensington campus



Data source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Accountability and Assessment, Division of Assessment, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) Performance Levels, <www.pde.state.pa.us/a_and_t/cwp/browse.asp?a=3&bc=0&c=27525>

REFLECTIONS ON FINDINGS

EPOP's and YUC's education campaigns succeeded in keeping the voices of parents and students at the forefront of reform. Their school-level organizing pushed district officials to respond to concrete and immediate needs – old facilities, violence in and surrounding schools, outdated and insufficient library materials – in the midst of major systemic upheaval. EPOP's research for the *Right to Know* report, in collaboration with Research for Democracy, helped to bring visibility to parents' and teachers' concerns in the wake of the state takeover of the district and provided district leaders with concrete strategies for communicating more effectively with parents. YUC's extensive research into small schools and their regular surveys of students at Kensington positioned the group to influence the new small schools and ensure that their curricular focus reflected both students' interests and best practices for effective small schools. By participating in the aspiring principals academy, EPOP helped to shape educators' perceptions of the role of parents in schools and of effective engagement strategies. Similarly, YUC staked out a role not only for young people but also for community organizations and residents in shaping new small schools and demanded that the district employ a process that included multiple voices.

Philadelphia was not an easy city in which to organize during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Successive waves of districtwide reform, takeover, privatization efforts, and ongoing reorganization strained an already thin civic and educational infrastructure. As school creation came to be seen as a tool for economic development in the Center City, EPOP and YUC emerged as key voices in the struggle to ensure that low-income neighborhoods would also benefit from reform.

Prior to the campaigns against state takeover, organizing groups in Philadelphia had little experience working at the citywide level to influence policy. EPOP's and YUC's evolving school reform analysis, strategies, and tactics trace an arc from a school-based approach to a district-level strategy and, then,

to the combination of both as the groups grappled with how to catalyze and sustain reform. Though EPOP secured important, concrete reforms in schools and across the district, the organization struggled internally with staff turnover as time progressed. The resulting stop-and-start nature of its school-based organizing made it difficult to respond to the challenge of a shifting district context.

Youth organizing faces the inherent challenge of leadership turnover as youth members graduate from high school and move on to college. But YUC's stable core of staff enabled the organization to maintain a consistent presence in schools and to draw lessons from its experiences that informed future campaigns. Through a school-based cycle of surveying their fellow students to identify concerns and mounting campaigns to demand change, YUC leaders secured important resources for long-neglected high schools. Successive victories pushed the organization deeper into issues of teaching and learning and, ultimately, toward seeking strategies for achieving a more sweeping transformation of school quality. The resulting small schools on the Kensington campus, though imperfect, demonstrate both the importance and the contribution that youth, parent, and community voices can bring to reform.

APPENDIX A

Data Sources for the Case Study Series

Over the six-year study, the study group collected and analyzed a total of 321 stakeholder interviews; 75 observations of organizing strategy sessions, campaign activities, and actions; 509 teacher surveys; and school demographic and standardized test score data.⁷

INTERVIEWS

Our research team conducted 321 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across the seven sites. Between January 2003 and September 2006, we conducted 160 interviews with organizing staff, 77 interviews with parent and youth leaders, 56 interviews with educators, and 28 interviews with allies. We also conducted 15 interviews with national network staff.

In the initial phase of the study, we interviewed organizing staff and leaders and focused on organizational characteristics – including each group’s mission, theory of change, strategy, capacity, and leadership development activities. Early interviews also aimed to understand the impetus for and strategies underlying groups’ campaigns for school improvement. To follow campaign developments, we interviewed organizing staff multiple times over the course of the study.

Interviews with allies, principals, teachers, district administrators, superintendents, and other key stakeholders elicited perceptions of the groups’ power and reach and the ways in which the groups’ organizing efforts may have impacted school, district, and community capacity.

OBSERVATIONS

During multiple site visits to each of the groups, we observed committee meetings, trainings, negotiation sessions, and public actions. More than seventy-five field notes written by research team members document these observations.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

We reviewed documentation and archival materials produced by the groups, including newsletters, organizational charts, and training materials, across five years of the study.

CONTEXT REVIEW

In addition to conducting extensive background research on the local and state context for each group (e.g., defining the critical policy reforms, state-level issues, governance structure for each school system, political landscape), we followed the local media coverage of education issues in all of our sites. Our database includes more than 1,700 articles. These articles, combined with the interview data, provide a picture of the shifting context for reform in each site.

TEACHER SURVEYS

We administered online teacher surveys in three sites – Austin, Miami-Dade, and Oakland – where organizing groups had used an intensive, school-based strategy of organizing and had mounted signature campaigns for several years. The survey explored four critical areas of school capacity: district support, school climate, professional culture, and instructional core. Survey questions were drawn from a variety of established measures, but primarily from scales developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Appendices in the Austin, Miami, and Oakland case studies include a description of survey measures and their psychometric properties.

⁷ We also collected 241 adult member surveys and 124 youth member surveys to understand how involvement in community organizing influenced members’ leadership skills and their community and political engagement. However, the case studies focused on school and district outcomes and do not include analysis of these parent and youth survey data. Results of these surveys will be presented in future publications.

Surveys were administered to teachers at schools where the group was highly engaged in organizing efforts, as well as in a set of comparison schools. A total of 509 teacher surveys were collected from the three sites.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

We also examined publicly available teacher and student data from all districts. Data vary from district to district but include measures of teacher and student race/ethnicity, years of teaching experience, dropout rates, graduation rates, student performance on standardized tests, and a range of other variables. To assess indicators that did not have corresponding data for publicly available download, data requests to the district were made. In Austin and Oakland, these publicly available data included district-administered parent and teacher surveys.

APPENDIX B

Data Sources for the EPOP and YUC Case Study

Our analysis drew on qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data included interviews, field observations, and archival documents produced by EPOP and YUC, the school district, and local and citywide media. Quantitative data were obtained from the School District of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

INTERVIEWS

To understand the theory and strategies guiding each organization's work and to learn about progress made toward education reform goals, our research team conducted a series of interviews: twenty-four interviews with EPOP staff and members and thirteen individual interviews and two group interviews with YUC staff and members between 2003 and 2006; five interviews with education advocates and allies in the city about their perceptions of the impact and effectiveness of EPOP and YUC; and seven interviews with school-level administrators and district-level leaders to learn their perspectives on the impact of the organizations' work.

To augment interview data, we attended meetings and events and observed training sessions in which EPOP and YUC members were supported in developing new leadership skills. We also reviewed documents produced by the group and monitored local, citywide, and national newspapers to keep abreast of the education context in Philadelphia.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Our research team downloaded 1996–2001 data on Philadelphia student demographics, attendance, teacher absences, and achievement on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) test from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. PSSA data were not available for all schools during the time

period of EPOP's active school-based organizing in the early 1990s. At the high school level, we downloaded data on student attendance (1997–2006), PSSA scores (2001–2005), SAT scores (2001–2007), college-bound intentions (1998–2006), dropout rates (1997–2006), and demographics (1997–2006). Attendance and socio-economic data for Kensington High School and Olney High School were not available for 2002–2003, 2003–2004, and 2004–2005. Data for 2003–2004 were obtained from the *Philadelphia School Notebook* "Profile on the Schools."

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